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ABSTRACT

Recently attention has been focused on the language problems of the Mexican American child. In order not to duplicate work done by other investigators in the field, it is necessary to study previous published material dealing with the language of these children. "A Brief Study of Spanish/English Bilingualism: Final Report" (D.M. Lance, Texas A&M University, 1969) is one of the few studies devoted to Spanish/English bilingualism in the Southwest United States. The research studies reported in that report are reviewed in this paper. This paper consists of 5 papers presenting partial analyses of data collected from an exploratory research project aimed at describing the use and characteristics of the language found in a Mexican American bilingual family living in Texas and the interferences between English and Spanish. The purpose is to evaluate those methodologies employed in terms of their relevancy to present activity. Comments are directed at the type of research methodology employed in each of the 5 subparts of the paper and suggestions are made for overcoming some of the difficulties. (Author/NQ)

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF STANDARD PROCEDURES FOR STUDYING SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM

Rosario C. Gingràs

Abstract

This document reviews the research studies reported in D. M. Lance, et al., *A brief study of Spanish-English bilingualism: Final report*, Texas A & M University, 1969. The studies dealt with the initial analysis of data collected from an exploratory research project aimed at describing the use and characteristics of the language found in a Mexican-American bilingual family living in Texas and the interferences between English and Spanish. The purpose is to evaluate those methodologies employed in terms of their relevancy to present Laboratory activity. Comments are directed at the type of research methodology employed in each of the five subparts of the paper and suggestions are made for overcoming some of the difficulties.

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF STANDARD PROCEDURES FOR STUDYING SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM

One of the goals of the Mexican-American Dialects activity is to "describe the English spoken by Population III children with emphasis on implications for reading instruction."[1] In order not to duplicate work done by other investigators in the field, it is necessary to study previous published material dealing with the language of Mexican-American children. Unfortunately, such material is very scarce since it has been only very recently that attention has been focused on the language problems of the Mexican-American child. The report by Donald M. Lance, et al. is thus important since it is one of the few such studies devoted to Spanish-English bilingualism in Southwest United States. Within the present Task Schedule,[2] Task I is devoted to methodology development, of which 1.2.1 (specific hypotheses and strategies relevant to Task II, stage one) has the goal of the formulation of hypotheses and heuristic strategies to test such hypotheses. This paper is a contribution to this specific part of the Task (1.2.1). By examining the attempts of other scholars and noting in what ways such attempts fail to reach stated goals, we will be able to overcome such shortcomings and thus have a higher probability of reaching our goals.

The report consists of five papers presenting partial analyses of data collected for an exploratory research project conducted in Bryan, Texas, 1969. The research staff are members of Texas A & M. Lance is the principal investigator (papers I, IV, V, and VI were written by him). Paper II was written by Gail M. Smith; Paper III by Barbara T. Ward. There are three appendices, including one written by David W. Smith.

The principal subjects for the project were three generations of one Spanish-speaking family born in a small town in South Texas.

Paper I
Discussion of Research Procedures and General Observations Regarding Bilingualism (D. M. Lance)

The interview technique consisted of totally unstructured conversation, in order to get "casual" speech. Subjects were selected by subjective evaluation of author and a Spanish-speaking Protestant minister. The family was regarded as "representative." Questions explored included:

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[1]See Russell, TN-2-70-19, page 3.

[2]See Activity 204, Mexican-American Dialects, Task Schedule (updated 2/6/71).

1) the facility with which each generation uses Spanish and/or English.

2) the extent and nature of deviations from "standard" Spanish in the language of each generation.

3) amount of borrowing that occurs when the informants speak only Spanish or only English.

4) the nature and amount of their "errors" in English.

5) the differences due to "interference phenomena" as contrasted between the English spoken by four Dominican Republic students at Texas A & M and the Bryan residents.

The stated initial intention was to conduct interviews with all subjects in both Spanish and English, with the graduate assistants doing most of the interviewing in English and the principal investigator (Lance, who is Anglo) in Spanish. This failed since the children were unable to speak Spanish with Lance. Lance also failed to get the grandfather to speak English without discomfort. The first generation only responded in Spanish, the third only in English, while the second generation was able to control both languages with comfort.

Lance relates an incident involving Gustavo Gonzalez, a graduate student at the University of Texas. "When he [Gonzalez] was teaching a kindergarten class for a practicum course in Austin during the summer of 1969, the children at first refused to believe that he could actually speak Spanish, apparently because he was wearing a coat and tie."

Lance concludes that "each language seems to have its own social domain, and deviations from the expected use of Spanish are interpreted by school children as anomolous behavior." Spanish is restricted to the most relaxed or familiar interpersonal relationships. Lance finds evidence (not otherwise discussed) to support the view that the Mexican-Americans are undergoing accelerated integration into Anglo culture.

Lance specifically rejects the notion that the Mexican-Americans speak a mixture of Spanish and English that cannot be called either English or Spanish. He claims that "Tex-Mex" speakers merely have a highly versatile linguistic competence encompassing a dialect of English, a dialect of Spanish, and the ability to use a mixture of the two when the social situation is ambiguous as to the choice of language or dialect for etiquette purposes. The second generation subjects were able to speak strictly Spanish or English when asked to do so.

Lance suggests English is a <u>public language</u> and that Spanish is a <u>private language</u> (i.e., restricted to the family and family circle of friends). He also tries to separate the difference between borrowing and intercode-switching.

Lance further claims that the English of the Mexican-Americans is primarily a "dialect" of English rather than simply a second language that has not been fully internalized. The reason that Mexican-Americans have been regarded as speaking an inadequately internalized variety of English stems from the fact that few of them have progressed very far in school in the past, hence they never learned standard English, which takes a long time to be internalized.

Critique of Paper I

Lance's paper is very suggestive, and it is only exploratory in nature. While no answers were arrived at, many questions do come up. Lance's view of bilingualism is rather simplistic since he tries very hard to support the view that the Mexican-American speakers have two distinct codes with little interference. He does not investigate the existence of a contact language in Bryan. Perhaps one does not exist, or at least his subjects do not give evidence for one, nevertheless, it is an open question. The main flaw to the study is the absolute lack of controls over the selection of the subjects. We have no way to judge just how typical the family's speech is. Since Lance did interview some of the family's neighbors, he should have at least asked the neighbors to comment on the kind of language used by the family (common, typical, etc.). The author's main concern seems to be with an attack on certain racist views held by educators concerning the speech of Mexican-Americans. He seems to want to argue for the view that the Mexican-Americans are assimilating and that the third generation can speak English, albeit a substandard dialect "due to lack of educational opportunities" (as Lance phrases it). Consequently, the report (especially as presented in Paper I), stands somewhere between anecdote and serious research. Lance is more concerned with attitudes toward language, rather than in the description of the varieties of language spoken in Bryan.

Paper II
Some Comments on the English of Eight Bilinguals (G. M. Smith)

This is a short summary about the English spoken by the children in the family. Smith claims that all the children could communicate effectively in English, and none seemed to have any trouble understanding the English spoken to them.

> Very little of their non-standard English can be attributed to interference from Spanish; most of their mistakes are more reasonably traced to something that might be called arrested language development. The problems the parents encounter in speaking English are similar to those encountered by the children.

The errors the children make (nonstandard English) are grouped into various classes:

1) language development problems (analogical leveling, rule simplification, etc.).

2) regional dialect errors closely associated with social class (i.e., substandard English constructions and usage).

3) errors due to Spanish interference; few in number, and many of these are probably "borrowed from their parents."

Examples are given for the three types of errors.

Critique of Paper II

The biggest objection to this paper is considering anything that is not standard English to be an error. Given the lack of a linguistic authority (especially in Texas), standard English winds up being the author's notion of what "good" English is. Consequently, there is no way to distinguish between characteristics of Texas English (divided into various sociolects), a possibly Hispanicized English and errors due to developmental problems. The sentence "And he kiss her" (for standard English, "And he kissed her"), is considered deviant, but it is not clear whether certain classes of speakers normally simplify clusters (i.e., "kissed" becomes "kiss") in Bryan, hence not an "error." Since the whole idea of rule-governed linguistic behavior is completely alien to the researcher, this paper is only good for a handful of examples of sentences. To claim that the children can communicate effectively in English and that they have no trouble in understanding English is to completely deny that these children have any language problems. How this conclusion is reached is rather difficult to explain, especially since the author cites examples of major interference from Spanish (the inability to distinguish clearly between do/make, in/on, here/there, gender concordance, etc.).

Paper III
Analysis of the English of Four Spanish-speaking Foreign Students
(B. T. Ward)

This is an analysis of the errors made by four Dominican students at Texas A & M, while speaking English. The type of Spanish spoken by them is not referred to. It was felt that the errors (nonstandard English) made would most likely be due to interference from Spanish. The data gathered is from 1½ hours of conversation recorded with the students. The analysis of the errors made by the Domincans is contrasted with the errors made by Spanish-speaking migrant children in South Texas

(in a study by Gustavo Gonzalez[3]). There is a great amount of difference in age between the two groups, a point recognized by the author. The Dominicans were in their twenties, and had been studying English at Texas A & M for at least one year (but it is not noted if they had studied English in the Domincan Republic; the author states that the students did not speak English before coming to Texas). Since the Spanish-speaking migrant children are not identified beyond the fact that they speak Spanish, it is very difficult to appraise the study. The author concludes that the errors made by the migrant children are generally due to the substandard dialect they have been exposed to (again, error being defined as nonstandard English; the errors the Dominicans make are of a very different type and relatable to interference from Spanish. For example, the Dominicans have problems with the mass/count noun distinction (according to the author) and, they commonly omit the plural morpheme on the noun, two things that the migrant children seldom do. On the other hand, the migrant children frequently omitted the third person singular morpheme in the present tense on the verb, which is something that the Dominicans seldom did (or so goes the claim).

Critique of Paper III

The study is very inconclusive and suffers from several obvious flaws. First of all, little information is furnished on the children's background. We do not know under what circumstances the data was originally elicited. The author ignores the great differences that exist between Dominican and Mexican Spanish. In particular, many of the so-called errors reported for the Dominicans may be due to phonological interference. Since Dominican Spanish commonly deletes underlying /s/ in postvocalic position, this may result in having the Dominicans delete the plural marker in English, with the concomitant effect of creating problems with mass/count noun distinctions. On the other hand, if the migrant children speak a dialect of English that has simplification of final clusters, in particular, a cluster ending in a dental, then it might appear that the distinction between past and present tense is being ignored (superficially). Thus by having ignored phonological interference from both Dominican Spanish and from the substandard dialect of English spoken by the children, very different types of syntactic and morphological errors would seem to occur. The second obvious flaw is having compared such chronologically different groups. The migrant children probably have many errors resulting from developmental problems and may ultimately correct them. Of course the whole study is predicated on a rather simplistic and naive notion of grammatical error. In sum, the intention of the author was good, but the results are not worth considering.

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[3]The study is identified only as preliminary and unpublished.

Paper IV
Dialect and Non-standard Forms in Texas Spanish (D. M. Lance)

Lance tries to attack the popular view (in Texas) that Texas Spanish is impoverished in its vocabulary and grammar and is generally "corrupt." He observes that the subjects in the project used very few forms that are not also used in other parts of the Spanish-speaking world. The most striking difference seems to be in the confusion of the forms for the imperfect tense, the conditional, and the past subjunctive forms of certain verbs. Phonologically, two things seem to separate Texas Spanish from standard (Mexican) Spanish: 1) a rule that changes underlying /s/ into surface aspiration: nohotroh, dihen, clahe, and so forth; 2) deletion of the palatal glide when it occurs between a front vowel and a back vowel (generally /a/); tortia (tortilla), ea (ella), etc. In general, the forms, found in the study correspond to Northern rural Mexican Spanish. The author notes that there has been much lexical borrowing from English, but that in general there has been little interference from English. The author also includes a list of lexicon items defined.

Critique of Paper IV

Except for the list of words provided, the author does not come up with anything that is not already widely-known. Again, like the first paper, this paper is an attack on certain prevailing views of the nature of Texas Spanish. If one believes that Mexican-Americans in Texas speak corrupt Spanish, then the paper is worth reading, otherwise not so.

Paper V
The Mixing of English and Spanish (D. M. Lance)

Lance suggests that language switching does not occur simply because the speaker does not know a particular word in one language or the other; rather the word or phrase that is most available at the moment for some usually unexplainable reason is the one that comes out. The treatment of data is largely anecdotal. Lance suggests that the relative amount of English or Spanish used depends on whether the speaker is dominant in one language or the other. A statistical table provided (page 81) suggests that social factors are at work in determining the relative amount of switching going on, but the author does not emphasize this point. Many examples of switching are also given. The amount of switching in the children is compared with that of the adults. The author concludes that the oldest generation will use the most Spanish (little switching into English), since it is the most Spanish dominant, the second generation shows almost an equal amount of switching between English and Spanish, while the children use mostly English with some switching into Spanish (they being most English dominant).

Critique of Paper V

The author seems to have collapsed several questions: 1) the nature of code-switching; 2) frequency of code-switching; 3) amount of dominance by one or the other language. The frequency of code-switching seems to be determined by various social contexts. However, since the author did not explore this point, only hints occur throughout the paper. The speakers seem to cluster into two groups: 1) those who speak mostly English with some switching into Spanish; 2) those who speak mostly Spanish with some switching into English. Since the author seems determined to show that the Mexican-Americans are assimilating, the data is presented in such a way as to conclude that: 1) the first generation speaks mostly Spanish, but able to switch into English; 2) the second generation seems to be able to switch between English and Spanish with ease; 3) the youngest generation speaks mostly English, but with the ability to switch into Spanish. One cannot determine from the paper the social contexts in which such switching might occur. The author seems to suggest that there are psychological reasons for choosing one language over the other (something akin to ease of articulation). The author does not go beyond stating that the subjects dominate both languages (at least the second and third generations), and that switching occurs under rather mysterious circumstances. Lance never explored the possibility that code-switching might have to occur under certain circumstances. The reader is lead to the conclusion that code-switching is under the control of the speaker totally, hence, switching can be avoided if the speaker so desires. In general, since the whole set of data was collected with very few controls, it is difficult to evaluate the findings. Lance correctly observes that linguistic competence is not the principal parameter in the processes underlying the mixing of the two languages. But unfortunately, he does not provide us with any hints as to what the principal parameter might be. Lance rejects the idea of creolization as the end result of the mixing of languages. He claims that the mixing of English and Spanish in the same sentence is a very relaxed and arbitrary switching of codes, both of which are available for use at any time. Lance does not show this claim to be true. In fact, quite the opposite might be true. It is unlikely that these speakers would have equal competence in both languages. The whole dynamic process of code-switching is considered as something that "just happens." Consequently, that code-switching is an inherent part of the linguistic competence is simply not considered.

Paper VI
Conclusions and Implications (D. M. Lance)

This is a summary of what is supposed to be in each of the preceding five papers. Lance suggests that more studies are needed (an understatement) and that something should be done about effecting a change in the attitudes of both Mexican-American and Anglos toward the language and culture of the people under scrutiny.

Appendix I: list of interviewers and subjects.
Appendix II: a statistical table showing the incidence of mixing of English and Spanish among all the subjects (not very informative since the total number of sentences uttered by each speaker is considered without regard to context).
Appendix III: a statistical analysis of the word count in Appendix II (written by D. W. Smith). The analysis shows that the English-dominant subject uses proportionally more English words than the Spanish-dominant subject.

Although the report can be seen to be very inconclusive, it must be noted that this is one of the very few reports that has appeared dealing with Mexican-American bilingualism. In a more general framework, studies on code-switching have been limited in number and in scope (most seem to deal with code-switching in India, and other exotic places). Consequently, the report stands out as an important attempt to describe linguistic phenomena for which there does not yet exist a generally known theoretical framework within which to describe such phenomena. An important task within the Mexican-American Dialects activity is to provide just such a theoretical framework.

From the report, certain suggestions can be drawn that may be worth exploring further. Among these, we should especially note:

1) In eliciting data, the socioeconomic and ethnic background of the interviewer can influence the linguistic behavior of the subject(s). For example, if the interviewer is seen as belonging to a higher social class (by the way the interviewer dresses, speaks, or merely because he belongs to a different ethnic group, e.g., Anglo), the subject may try to use a more formal style, or possibly use (more) English, in the case of a Mexican-American. To overcome this particular problem, it would be necessary to employ interviewers of different backgrounds and have each of the interviewers elicit data from the same subject(s). By recognizing the interviewer as a variable, additional sociolinguistic data can be gained at the same time reducing the risk of having the data biased. This suggests that the Mexican-American Dialects activity should employ interviewers of Mexican-American background, in addition to the Anglo staff members. The Mexican-American interviewers, in turn, should belong to different socioeconomic classes. By increasing the number and types of interviewers, it should be possible to reduce the size of the population sample. One of the major problems that confronts sociolinguists is trying to structure interviews in such a way as to obtain samples of different styles from the same subject(s). By concentrating on the interviewer as a variable, we may find an easier way of getting such samples.

2) It is crucial to have certain kinds of socioeconomic information on subjects as well as interviewers, otherwise it will prove difficult, if not impossible to evaluate data within socio-

linguistic terms. In particular, we should have information of the following type: years of formal education, occupation (of parent, in the case of children), family income, birthplace, places where subject has resided, number of siblings, members of family subject lives with (or lived with during childhood), mother tongue, number of children (if adult subject).

3) Attention must be given to whether a particular piece of data represents a developmental problem or interference by a second language (or dialect). Most sociolinguistic research has concentrated on the speech of adults or adolescents. The speech of children is different from that of adults in that a child is still modifying the grammar that he initially acquired. Much more research is needed in order to understand in what ways the learning of a second language interferes with and influences the first language that a child is still in the process of acquiring, as well as the ways that the first language influences and interferes with the acquisition of the second language. For example, if a bilingual Mexican-American child of the age of eight has difficulty in distinguishing between mass and count nouns in English (e.g., furniture and chair), can we attribute this difficulty to the fact that in Spanish mueble ("furniture") and silla ("chair") are both count nouns, or is it the case that most monolingual children at the age of eight do not yet distinguish between these two categories? We have very scanty information on the way monolingual Spanish-speaking children acquire their language; we have even less information on the way bilingual children learn their two languages.

4) Greater attention must be given to social contexts as well as linguistic contexts when considering code-switching. In particular, we should explore the question whether code-switching occurs as a result of having internalized two different grammars, or whether there is a specific code for code-switching which operates on two different grammars and must be learned apart from the two other codes. This is to say, competence in two distinct languages (dialects) may be a necessary condition for code-switching, but it is not a sufficient condition.

5) Greater attention must be paid to the general question of "language function," i.e., under what circumstances does a bilingual speaker employ English, Spanish, or code-switching (or, alternatively, Standard English, Black English, or code-switching). This information is necessary for the preparation of reading materials in the early grades. If a bilingual child generally uses Spanish at home, that child might not be familiar with all the lexical items that a monolingual English speaker would generally be expected to know. Materials having "home-situations" as main topics may prove very difficult for such a bilingual child. This suggests that reading materials might have to be restricted to "school-situations" that the bilingual child would be expected to have most experience with in English.

6) The idea that bilinguals exist who have equal competence in two languages should be abandoned. While isolated bilinguals may approach the ideal state where they have equal competence in their two languages, for the vast majority of bilinguals, their two languages have different functions and consequently are not equal. Assuming that the Mexican-American has equal competence in both English and Spanish might not only be a false assumption, but such an assumption may be a distinct disservice to the Mexican-American child.

7) More basic research on the need for acquiring formal styles and the ways such acquisition occurs must be undertaken. The acquisition of formal styles appears to occur after the age of six in an academic environment. The Mexican-American child is seldom exposed to formal varieties of Spanish in school. The emphasis in his academic experience is on the acquisition of formal styles of English. As a consequence of this, the Mexican-American child is apt to lack any command of formal Spanish, while having some command of formal English. In this way, the Mexican-American bilingual child is very different from the monolingual Spanish-speaking child who may receive training in formal Spanish (e.g., in Mexico). The Mexican-American bilingual child is different from the Anglo-American child in that the Mexican-American has less exposure to formal English (due to assorted reasons) and will probably acquire competence in some substandard dialect of English, but with very limited skill in Standard English. Thus the Mexican-American child winds up with unequal competence in two substandard dialects that tend to be stigmatized by monolinguals competent in either formal Spanish or English. This suggests two possible courses of action (among others): 1) expose the Mexican-American child to both formal Spanish and formal English, or 2) increase the amount of time currently devoted to Standard English. At the present time, we lack information upon which to base a decision as to which course to follow. We must have more research into the attitudes that the Mexican-American community has toward English and Spanish, the kind of English that the Mexican-American child succeeds in acquiring, the attitudes that Anglo-Americans have toward the kind of English learned by Mexican-Americans (if this should prove to be an institutionalized substandard dialect of English), the functional roles that English and Spanish have in the community. Solid information must be available before pedagogical strategies can be recommended.

8) It is possible to show statistically that bilinguals are dominant in one of their two languages. It may be possible to devise diagnostic tests that will allow us to determine quickly whether a given Mexican-American child is dominant in English or Spanish. The types of materials for teaching Standard English will probably differ if the child is already dominant in English or

if the child is still dominant in Spanish. The Mexican-American Dialects activity ought to focus on constructing such diagnostic tests after the main sociolinguistic study has been completed. Other activities should explore the need for devising materials aimed at four different kinds of students. We probably have four different groups of Mexican-American children: 1) Spanish monolinguals (TESL materials being appropriate): 2) English-Spanish bilinguals, with Spanish dominance; 3) English-Spanish bilinguals, with English dominance; 4) those children that are monolingual in English but speak a Hispanicized substandard dialect of English. These various groups require different types of instructional material. The Mexican-American Dialects activity will provide the information as to what types of groups exist.

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